

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS

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1. An information reference apparatus comprising:
- a reference information storage part storing predetermined reference information;
- 10      a reference range defining information storage part storing predetermined reference range defining information; and
- a reference range defining part referring to the reference range defining information stored
- 15 for a user by said reference range defining information storage part and defining a range of the reference information stored by said reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the user to
- 20 refer to.
- 25
2. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:
- a contribution receiving part receiving a contribution from a user and storing the contribution in said reference information storage
- 30 part.
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3. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:
- an authenticating part allowing a user to

refer to the reference information after an authentication of the user is normally finished.

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4. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

10 a search range defining part responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus for referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part, and thereby defining a range of the reference information, in which range  
15 the reference information is available for the search.

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5. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

an URL management part registering an URL for each user, and being responsive to an URL  
25 reference request sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network for returning to the apparatus, information of URL previously registered for the relevant user.

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6. The information reference apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein:

35 each user is given an attribute, and a user who makes a contribution is allowed to define a range of users who are allowed to refer to

information included in the contribution, by  
designating the attribute thus given to the users.

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7. The information reference apparatus as  
claimed in claim 1, further comprising a referred  
information managing part storing information for  
10 determining whether or not an item of the reference  
information has been already referred to by a  
specific user, and enabling said specific user to  
determine that the item of reference information has  
been already referred to by himself or herself with  
15 a use of the thus-stored information, upon receiving  
a reference request from the specific user.

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8. The information reference apparatus as  
claimed in claim 1, wherein:  
the reference range defining information  
comprises information designating, for each item of  
25 the reference information, a range of users who are  
allowed to refer thereto, a determination as to  
whether or not each item of the reference  
information is available for a particular user being  
made by determining whether or not an attribute set  
30 for the particular user is included in said range of  
users designated for said item of the reference  
information.

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9. An information reference system

comprising:

a reference information storage part  
storing predetermined reference information;

5 a reference range defining information  
storage part storing predetermined reference range  
defining information; and

a reference range defining part referring  
to the reference range defining information stored  
for a user by said reference range defining  
10 information storage part and defining a range of the  
reference information stored by said reference  
information storage part, in which range the  
reference information is available for the user to  
refer to.

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10. The information reference system as  
20 claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

a contribution receiving part receiving a  
contribution from a user and storing the  
contribution in said reference information storage  
part.

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11. The information reference system as  
30 claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

an authenticating part allowing a user to  
refer to the reference information when an  
authentication for the user is normally finished.

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12. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

5 a search range defining part responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus for referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part, and thereby defining a range of the reference information stored in the reference information storage part, in which range  
10 the reference information is available for the search.

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13. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising:

an URL management part registering an URL for each user, and being responsive to an URL  
20 reference request sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network for returning, to the user's apparatus, information of URL previously registered for the user.

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14. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, wherein:

30 each user is given an attribute, and a user who makes a contribution is allowed to define a range of users who are allowed to refer to information included in the contribution, by designating the attribute thus given to the users.

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15. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, further comprising a referred information managing part storing information for determining whether or not an item of the reference information has been already referred to by a specific user, and enabling said specific user to determine that the item of reference information has been already referred to by himself or herself with a use of the thus-stored information, upon receiving a reference request from the specific user.

16. The information reference system as claimed in claim 9, wherein:  
the reference range defining information comprises information designating for each item of the reference information a range of users who are allowed to refer to said item of the reference information, a determination as to whether or not each item of the reference information is available to be referred to by a particular user being made by determining whether or not an attribute set for said particular user is included in said range of users thus designated for said item of the reference information.

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17. An information reference program causing a computer to execute the steps of:  
a) storing predetermined reference information in a reference information storage part;  
b) storing predetermined reference range defining information in a reference defining

information storage part; and

c) referring to the reference range  
defining information stored for a user in said  
reference range defining information storage part  
5 and defining a range of the reference information  
stored in said reference information storage part,  
in which range the reference information is  
available for the user to refer to.

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18. The information reference program as  
claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to  
15 execute the step of:

d) receiving a contribution from a user  
and storing the contribution in said reference  
information storage part.

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19. The information reference program as  
claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to  
25 execute the step of:

d) allowing a user to refer to the  
reference information stored in the reference  
information storage part when an authentication for  
the user is normally finished.

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20. The information reference program as  
35 claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to  
execute the step of:

d) responsive to a search request from a

user's apparatus, referring to the reference range  
defining information from said reference range  
defining information storage part, and thereby  
defining a range of the reference information stored  
5 in the reference information storage part, in which  
range the reference information is available for the  
search.

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21. The information reference program  
claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to  
execute the step of:

15 d) registering an URL for each user, and  
being responsive to an URL reference request sent  
from a user's apparatus via a communication network  
for returning, to the user's apparatus, information  
of URL previously registered for the user.

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22. The information reference program as  
25 claimed in claim 17, causing the computer to execute  
the step of:

d) providing each user with an attribute,  
and allowing a user who makes a contribution to  
define a range of users who are allowed to refer to  
30 information included in the contribution, by  
designating the attribute thus given to the users.

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23. The information reference program as  
claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to



execute the step of:

5           d) storing information for determining  
whether or not an item of the reference information  
has been already referred to by a specific user, and  
enabling said specific user to determine that the  
item of reference information has been already  
referred to by himself or herself with a use of the  
thus-stored information, upon receiving a reference  
request from the specific user.

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24. The information reference program as  
15 claimed in claim 17, further causing the computer to  
execute the steps of:

          d) creating the reference range defining  
information to comprise information designating for  
each item of the reference information a range of  
20 users who are allowed to refer to said item of the  
reference information, and making a determination as  
to whether or not each item of the reference  
information is available to be referred to by a  
particular user by determining whether or not an  
25 attribute set for said particular user is included  
in said range of users thus designated for said item  
of the reference information.

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25. A computer readable information  
storage medium storing therein the program claimed  
in claim 17.

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26. A computer readable information  
storage medium storing therein the program claimed  
in claim 18.

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27. A computer readable information  
storage medium storing therein the program claimed  
10 in claim 19.

15 28. A computer readable information  
storage medium storing therein the program claimed  
in claim 20.

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29. A computer readable information  
storage medium storing therein the program claimed  
in claim 21.

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30. A computer readable information  
30 storage medium storing therein the program claimed  
in claim 22.

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31. A computer readable information  
storage medium storing therein the program claimed

in claim 23.

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32. A computer readable information storage medium storing therein the program claimed in claim 24.

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33. An information reference method comprising the steps of:

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a) storing predetermined reference information in a reference information storage part;

b) storing predetermined reference range defining information in a reference defining information storage part; and

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c) referring to the reference range defining information stored for a user in said reference range defining information storage part and defining a range of the reference information stored in said reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the user to refer to.

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34. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

d) receiving a contribution from a user and storing the contribution in said reference information storage part.

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35. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

- d) allowing a user to refer to the reference information stored in the reference information storage part when an authentication for the user is normally finished.

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36. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

- d) responsive to a search request from a user's apparatus, referring to the reference range defining information from said reference range defining information storage part and thereby defining a range of the reference information stored in the reference information storage part, in which range the reference information is available for the search.

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37. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

- d) registering an URL for each user, and being responsive to an URL reference request sent from a user's apparatus via a communication network for returning, to the user's apparatus, information of URL previously registered for the user.

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38. The information reference method as claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

d) providing each user an attribute, and  
allowing a user who makes a contribution to define a  
range of users who are allowed to refer to  
information included in the contribution, by  
5 designating the attribute thus given to the users.

10 39. The information reference method as  
claimed in claim 33, further comprising the step of:

d) storing information for determining  
whether or not an item of the reference information  
has been already referred to by a specific user, and  
15 enabling said specific user to determine that the  
item of reference information has been already  
referred to by himself or herself with a use of the  
thus-stored information, upon receiving a reference  
request from the specific user.

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25 40. The information reference program as  
claimed in claim 34, further comprising the step of:

d) creating the reference range defining  
information to comprise information designating for  
each item of the reference information a range of  
users who are allowed to refer to said item of the  
30 reference information, and making a determination as  
to whether or not each item of the reference  
information is available to be referred to by a  
particular user by determining whether or not an  
attribute set for said particular user is included  
35 in said range of users thus designated for said item  
of the reference information.